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BATH  
IN HISTORY AND SOCIAL  
TRADITION



# BATH

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IN HISTORY AND SOCIAL  
TRADITION

LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET

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## NOTE

ANY student of eighteenth-century Bath is unfortunate if he has not read, and ungenerous if when read he does not praise, Barbeau's monograph.\* To it the present writer wishes to admit his obligation.

Other Bath books which may interest casual visitors are :

An Essay towards a Description of Bath  
by John Wood, architect. 2 vols.  
1749.

Life of Nash, by Oliver Goldsmith. Globe  
edition.

The Eighteenth-Century Architecture of  
Bath, by Mowbray A. Green. 1904.

Life and Letters of William Beckford, by  
Lewis Melville. 1910.

The Linleys of Bath, by Clementina Black.  
1911.

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\* Une Ville d'Eaux Anglaise au XVIII<sup>e</sup>  
Siècle. 1904.

And from the literary side :

The New Bath Guide, by Christopher Anstey.

Sheridan's Rivals and School for Scandal.

Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey and Persuasion.

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# BATH

## IN HISTORY AND SOCIAL TRADITION

### I

PRINCE BLADUD, Roman remains, a late Abbey Church, a capital of fashion in the eighteenth century, its decline, a high-born watering-place in reduced circumstances, are pictures that present themselves when Bath is mentioned.

Prince Bladud's story is too familiar to tell at length. He was the son of King Lud Hudibras (Phœbus, what a name !), but contracted leprosy and was driven out into the wilderness. There he became a swineherd, infected his pigs, noticed one day that after rolling themselves in a pool of steaming mire they came out clean, followed their example, and was recovered of his leprosy.

He was received back into grace, assumed the sceptre on his father's death, and built Bath by the mire-pit.

Later on he went to Greece, was elected a "professor in the University of Athens," returned to Bath, and built a famous temple of Minerva. Much of his time was spent in magic and miracles, and he met his death by attempting to fly from the top of his own temple. John Wood, the great Bath architect, devotes chapters to prove the truth of every one of these statements. "The era," he says, "has been too supinely called fabulous." But even Wood is forced to admit that he is not quite sure whether it was in 1775 or 1765 B.C. that the mire-pit was discovered; and the Pickwick Papers must remain the safest authority for the history of Prince Bladud.

In turning to Roman days we still move within the mist. Except the evidence of the soil, there are indeed few

guides to Roman England. Amiable local antiquaries, fad-riders, or pot-boiling compilers of manuals, will tell us this or that for very truth ; but the wise man goes warily, and takes most of it for conjecture, and much for very hazardous conjecture indeed. He who chooses may join in their discussions with a sublime confidence that he knows as much as anyone else. Even in Italy, even in Rome, with all the resources of a great literature to draw upon, those who are still on the central table-land of life have seen the attribution of great buildings altered half a dozen times. Vast Imperial structures of the Palatine figure now as a palace of Caligula, now of Germanicus, now of Nero ; even the modest house of Livia suddenly becomes the house of Drusus. Temples and theatres, arches and aqueducts, columns and baths, shed their old names and acquire others with fatal facility ; the Sacred Way itself meanders now on this

#### 4 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

side of the Forum, now on that, at the caprice of successive antiquaries. After all, does it much matter? Let us throw the antiquaries overboard, let us label buildings with our own tickets and weave our own romance about them.

Documentary evidence for Roman Britain is slight indeed. It is the fashion to talk of the Antonine Itinerary as if its names and routes and distances could be identified as readily as in a Murray's guide. Nothing can be more absurd. Except by Procrustean method, distances very often cannot be made to fit names, and in many cases whole systems of well-ascertained Roman roads find no mention at all. Problems are complicated by a forged itinerary which appeared in the eighteenth century under the name of "Richard of Cirencester,"\*

\* Charles Bertram, the son of an English hosier who had settled in Copenhagen, was born in 1723 and died in 1765. "He was," says Mayor, "contemptible alike as penman,

and obtained much credence. Its fancy Roman names were eagerly adopted and have been passed on from one "anti-quary" to another. They found their way into Ordnance Maps and some still appear there.

The Antonine Itinerary omits some Roman towns which were certainly of capital importance. We cannot guess

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Latinist, historian, geographer, and critic." In 1747 he began writing letters to Stukeley, most credulous of antiquaries, about a manuscript British itinerary *de Situ Britanniae*, which he had "found" in Copenhagen. He foisted its composition on to Richard of Cirencester, a real monastic writer (*circa* 1400), and Stukeley accepted it with avidity. The manuscript was, of course, never forthcoming, but Bertram sent a laughable facsimile of a page of it which Stukeley published. The forgery was at first probably an undergraduate's joke, and afterwards persisted in when Bertram saw how completely he had hoodwinked Stukeley. The Royal Society, the Society of Antiquaries, and the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, endorsed it, and for a century editions were published.

the reason. A ready instance occurs in Dorchester, Dorset, a town probably inferior to very few in Roman England. Local antiquaries, in their determination not to allow their own town to be left out, dubbed it Durnovaria, though it cannot be Durnovaria if any value is to be attached to the distances given in the Antonine Itinerary. The same thing occurs in the case of a lesser Roman town — Dorchester, in Oxfordshire, where Richard of Cirencester's fancy name of Dorocina was adopted. Roman nomenclature in England remains and probably will remain largely a matter of conjecture.

There are, no doubt, certain general indications to be found in Cæsar or Tacitus, but for purposes of accurate topography Cæsar may be neglected as completely as Ptolemy, and the Antonine Itinerary and Notitia are but broken reeds.

It might be thought that few to-day



would imitate the laborious Dr. Guest in tracing the excursions of Aulus Plautius, yet we still find historians of repute following the same system and extending it even to the Scotch campaigns of Severus. They wrestle gravely and bravely to turn the slipshod stories of the early centuries into historical record. There is a patter of *valla* and *limites*, *rheumata* and *chomata*, bridges have to be built where no rivers ran, tidal marshes have to be fascinated where no tides ever came, and all the while we know that so far as any local identification is concerned Xiphilin and Dio, Spartian, Herodian, the Scriptores, and all the rest of them, may be swept with a besom into the North Sea.

England is thickly sown with relics of Rome, with Italian flowers and fruits and trees, with fortresses and business-towns and pleasure-towns, and with those great villas whose aloof and self-contained luxury was a feature of

Roman playgrounds, whether in Britain, or North Africa, or Sicily, or Southern France. It might be imagined, said Hallam, from the number of coins found here, there, and everywhere, that Romans spent their time in sowing money broadcast.

Round all these things a Roman tradition has been built up in England, a tradition which some contend is due to Roman blood, which still pervades the English race. There are not wanting some to say that we owe more of character and feature to the Roman or pre-Roman strain than to all that Saxon, Dane, or Norman added in the later years. Look, they say, at the faces in any collection of Roman statues—look even at the commonplaces of sepulchral effigy, and you will find the type English, nothing more, and nothing less. Turn to the other end of the scale and visit the amazing collection of Imperial busts in the Capitol Museum at Rome.

The circumstances of their production are as certain a guarantee of truth as is the image on a coin ; and, besides all that, truth is written on their faces. They are all your kinsmen, the best and the worst, Cæsar or Caligula. You will shudder to see an English gentleman looking at you with the eyes of Vitellius, or an English lady with the mask of Agrippina. The subject is interesting, but the onus of proof rests with those who put forward the theory.

The Roman tradition has been sedulously nourished in these later years. Digging has become a fashion ; industrious associations from Newstead to Memory-Rings, from Corbridge to Caerleon, “howk up” the old Roman things with the same assiduity as prompts Italian pedants to turn the Forum into a stone-yard that they may know exactly what drains ran under Cæsar’s feet.

We must be thankful that modern

digging *has* become more methodical, more careful, more observant, under the pressure of better-informed opinion. Only thirty years ago a local antiquary was still rifling some of the great Dorset barrows ; he “ howked up ” gold and amber, and unfortunately met with some of the rarest of prehistoric finds. He kept no records ; he was, indeed, insolent in his carelessness. In more than one instance he built up a single vessel out of the shards of as many as three utterly different vessels by force of sheer ignorance and cement.

And yet it may be hoped that such things are less likely to occur to-day. There is, after all, a gulf between the preposterous nonsense of antiquaries of the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, or earlier nineteenth centuries, and the investigations of the later years. St. John Hope and St. George Gray are more scientific than Colt Hoare ; there is a great difference between the cock-

sureness of Horsley or Bruce and the cautious words of Professor Haverfield. "We are moving," he says, "in a land of doubts and shadows. Dogmatic assertions are common and trustworthy results correspondingly scarce." Such words and the multiplication of "it is said," "possibly," "probably," "traditionally," imply a great advance in criticism.

Certain elusive traditions whose source it is not easy to discover are not perhaps to be entirely neglected. They seem to emanate in part from the vague chronicles of Gildas, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Henry of Huntingdon, and others, and in part are untraceable. The possible longevity of tradition is indeed a matter for conjecture. There is a plausible instance of memory surviving from very early times in the case of a barrow. The story was current in the neighbourhood that a great bird watched over

treasure concealed in the mound. When the antiquaries opened the place a sepulchral chamber was found, the entrance to which was closed by a single stone roughly sculptured with a great bird. Such instances can be multiplied, and it is perhaps impossible to say definitely that no memories have survived from Roman times : commonplace instances are local stories of the horrid sack of Anderida and of the last legions of Rome sailing from Ringstead Bay in Dorset.

Let us resume the position that the contemporaneous, or nearly contemporaneous, documentary evidence at disposal is valueless if judged by any estimate of accuracy now acceptable. For any real knowledge of Roman-British times we must turn to the evidence of the soil—to those Roman objects and sites which have too often been “ill excavated and worse recorded.”

The great west road from Roman

London to Roman Bath ran through Silchester, Newbury, Marlborough, or Devizes. Silchester was probably Calleva, and traditionally "The City of the Five Ways"; and a little farther on there was a bifurcation of the road which gave the name of Spinæ to a Roman station. A trace of Spinæ has been found in Speen, or Speenhamland, a suburb of Newbury. The place is delightfully remembered in an epigram said to have been scratched on a pane of the Pelican Inn :

"The little inn at Speenhamland  
That lies below the hill  
May well be called the Pelican  
From its enormous bill."

Devizes is plausibly enough derived from *ad divisas*, another dividing of the ways (the old spelling of "the vies" scarcely militates against the derivation), and so the road went on to Bath.

Let us be bold and call Bath Aquæ Solis. Some jack-in-the-box antiquary

will pop up with Aquæ Sulis, and talk largely of an unintelligible deity, Minerva Sul. Let us be bold : Solis is quite as likely to have been corrupted into Sulis as Sulis into Solis. " Waters of the Sun " is romantic enough : let us take our stand with Heliogabalus, Mithras, and sun-worshippers in general. Sul is a misshapen word. The Romans, no doubt, found difficulty in wrestling with native names, and many of the Roman sites have an uncouth sound about them whether in Latin or in English—Carrawburgh, Hunnum-Chester, Regulbium, Reculvers, Duro-cornovium, Luguballium, and, surely worst of all, Blatum Bulgium.

There is little known of Roman Bath. It was a member of that Western triad which included Cirencester and Gloucester. It was probably the smallest town of the three, as Cirencester was certainly the largest, though Gloucester attained the rank of a *colonia*, of which there were



only four in Britain.\* Bath was neither a *colonia* nor even a *municipium*; perhaps it never was any more than a popular spa. There is no documentary evidence for Roman Bath; let us turn to the evidence of excavation.

Roman England may be divided into two portions by a line drawn roughly from York to Chester. The northern portion was military; the southern, civil and residential. The Wall, the great military rampart of the northern portion, stood between the wild men of the Scotch waste and the amenities of the South. North of York there were no Roman towns, though a certain trading and servile population sheltered round the military stations.

A curious difference is noticed between these two divisions. In the North Roman inscriptions abound, especially in the neighbourhood of the Wall; in the

\* The other three *coloniæ* were Colchester, York, and Lincoln.

South inscriptions are very infrequent, yet a Professor writes : "Inscriptions are the best proof of settled and permanent occupation." Many suggestions have been advanced to account for this. Some have set it down to lack of suitable stone in the South, and others to the piety of the soldiers in the North, who in the face of constant perils wished for tutelar protection, and so erected frequent altars to gods, Olympian or local. Neither explanation is convincing, though advocates of the stone theory may find some support in the fact that Bath has proved richer in inscriptions than most Southern towns. But the Bath inscriptions give no dates, and add little to our knowledge of the place except that it had a temple to this same Minerva Sulis. Exaggerated praise has been given to a gorgonid head which decorated the pediment of the temple. The place of the gorgon is taken by the fierce face of a man whose beard-ends

fly off into grotesque *mantling*. It has been compared in boldness to the "Corbridge lion," but neither has much claim to excellence, and the same is true of nearly all the countless relics of Roman art found in Britain. A torrent of monotonous and third-rate Roman provincial work completely swept out the finished and characteristic prehistoric forms. This is the more remarkable because the prehistoric work of Britain had been distinguished for its elegance and finish. British bronze, whether sword or brooch, is easily identified because it excels the prehistoric bronze of any other country in the world.

Roman Bath was no doubt built on what is called the chessboard plan. One series of parallel streets crossed another series of parallel streets at right angles, as may be traced to-day. This was the common arrangement of a Roman town: Lincoln, Dorchester, Winchester, Silchester, Trèves, Pom-

peii, occur as ready instances. The streets were narrow, but the houses were generally widely spaced in something of a garden-city fashion.

Of the Roman city, a not inconsiderable number of relics are to be seen in the museum, but the chief interest centres in the Roman bath itself. It is a striking—if mishandled—survival which at once impresses and oppresses. An air of ineffaceable sadness hangs about Roman remains in general. The Colosseum, the baths of Caracalla, the baths of Diocletian, the baths of Titus, the huddled ruins and awful substructures of the Palatine, the villa of Hadrian, affect the mind. There is an abiding gloom about such places. Some will say that it is the miasma rising from buried decadence, others that it is the regret for past and irrecoverable glory.

“It seems as if the earth were sad  
That she must show again  
Those ancient mysteries she had  
Concealed from common men.”

Some will make an exception in favour of the great aqueducts, but even the open champaign and the sun cannot purge them of their sadness. One feels instinctively that the correct setting for them is a stormy sunset, just as it is for the dark aqueduct of Valens bridging the valley in the background of Stamboul. It cannot be only baleful memories that make these things sad. No traditions attach to the Porta Nigra at Trèves or to the Foro Boario gateway at Rome, yet what can be more depressing than such buildings. It is the same with little things as with great, it is the same with every Roman remain in England, it is the same with diggings or ruins—with Corbridge or Reculvers, Chesters\* or Newstead, York or Silchester; they all are sad. Even the countless tessellated pavements, or the wild lilies-of-the-valley that Romans perhaps planted in the woods of Chedworth, will

\* Chesters (Cilurnum) on the Tyne.

not bring back cheerfulness. These things stand in strong contrast to the sunshine of Theocritus or the tamarisk beach where Nausicaa tossed her ball, or the fruit gardens of Alcinous or those bright legends which made Wordsworth long to see old Triton blowing on his horn. Nor does any feeling of sadness attach to the vast prehistoric earthworks of Wiltshire and Dorset. They are cheery enough places, with their short sward and little snail-shells, and harebells, and thyme. Is it mere fancy that would think the Bockerly Dyke more cheerful than the Northumbrian Wall? Writing of Dorchester-Casterbridge, most Roman of all English towns, Thomas Hardy says that no lovers ever made an assignation in the reputed Roman amphitheatre. Although it joins the town, it is too "melancholy, impressive, lonely." And at Bath the Roman bath is sombre and oppressive.

How Rome died out of England, and

when, and to what extent, will never be known. The letter of Honorius, the leaving of the legions, the groans of the Britons, and the other stories have passed into the limbo of conjecture, poetry, and legend. If a veil hangs over the Roman occupation, the darkness is even darker in the period which followed. The years from 400 to 600 have been called the "two lost centuries" of Britain. In that land of shadows antiquaries and historians tilt furiously at one another: "To follow their wild excursions, to witness their shock and mutual overthrow, is only to multiply bewilderment." "We have the names of leaders, but everyone is under the indictment of being nobody at all, or somebody else; we have list after list of battles, but each took place in several counties, or at various periods, or in the land of fable only."

A fateful silence broods over the two lost centuries. Through the mist flares

now and then balefire of battle and burning, pillage and massacre ; sometimes there gleams the white armour of a deliverer ; but all returns to conjecture, poetry, and legend. We can only say that it is probable that Saxons and the other wild men from the Frisian Basin made marauding settlements in East and South-East England about the middle of the fifth century, and took a hundred years to fight their way across the island. It was probably about the middle of the sixth century that they obtained possession of the valleys of Severn and Avon, and broke the peace and pleasure of the easy-living Roman settlements. Of the Western Triad Bath probably succumbed first. Its fall is commonly dated at 577. The great "salient" town of Cirencester was almost certainly the last of the three to fall. It is said to have outlasted all other Roman strongholds.

The gleaming walls and roofs of



Uriconium, the White City on the skirts of the Wrekin, have lingered in legend, and it is not unlikely that Bath presented something of the same appearance :

“ There were the baths  
 Hot on the breast.  
 Bright were the town-dwellings,  
 Many the princely halls,  
 High towered and splendid ;  
 Many a banquet hall  
 Full of the joy of man.  
 These all perished in wide slaughter ;  
 Death took off all  
 Their renowned warriors.  
 Therefore the courts are dreary.”

The question at once arises, How far did this destruction go? Were towns like Bath, Cirencester, and Gloucester ever “ destroyed ” ? It is not probable. It has been long the fashion to represent the Saxon hordes as a flight of locusts, moving slowly indeed but leaving no green leaf behind. The multitude of squabbling historians who have written on that period agree in this at least—

that they offer a surfeit of butchery and burning, of buildings levelled with the ground and salt-sown foundations. It is possible, nay probable, that these conventional horrors did in some cases occur. The sack of Anderida again returns to the imagination, but the fact of the story having lingered so long points to the event being exceptional.

The complete disappearance of places like Calleva or Uriconium is adduced to support the extermination theory, but the survival of most of the great Roman towns is an argument to the contrary. Extermination is inherently improbable, and in any case the continuity of these three great towns of Gloucester, Cirencester, and Bath, could never have been wholly broken. The manner of life was no doubt changed, and many things for which there was less use under a new régime fell into desuetude and neglect. The Basilica, the fort, the temple, the bath, and public buildings in

general, became of little account. These gaunt wrecks of Rome stood out in town and country. They impressed the Saxon imagination, and a great crop of chesters, cesters, caisters, and casters, were embodied in the new nomenclature. It is probable that the names of Cold Harbour or Cold Arbour which recur in widely scattered parts of England recall the memory of these damp and gloomy derelicts. "The thorns came up in her palaces, nettles and brambles in her fortresses. Satyr cried to his fellow and the screech-owl rested there."

At some time in the lost centuries Bath became Akemancester. Some see in this the "cester" to which men with aches came to get better of them ; others connect "Ake" with the first syllable of *Aquæ Solis*. Neither derivation carries any conviction, and it is more probable that Akeman is a patronymic.

Whether the extensive buildings of the Roman baths were destroyed or

used as a quarry or became ruinous through age, we do not know. It is improbable that the conquerors should have remained unacquainted for long with the amenities and medical uses of the hot water.\*

When a corner of the veil is next lifted, it is lifted on religious surroundings. A nunnery is said to have been established at Bath by Osric, an heptarchic King in 676. After its destruction by the Danes, King Offa is said to have replaced it in 775 by a house of Secular Canons, who in turn gave place to a Benedictine Monastery which Edgar is said to have founded *circa* 970. The charters recording all this can only be received with the greatest caution, and, as the baffled Dugdale remarks, "The Latin Charters of our Saxon Kings are occasionally unintelligible."

\* The "honourable" hot-water, as the Japanese say, applying the epithet to many other necessary delights.

The principle of hot baths was not altogether remote from polemics. Celsus, attacking Christianity, reproaches Christians with believing that hot springs rise from the tears of fallen angels, and Origen retorts that such things were never taught in the churches.

For centuries nothing is heard of bathing, but in 1138 a bath is mentioned as pertaining to a small leper hospital at Bath, and Bladud and his pigs and the mire-pit are recalled.

The Abbey Church at Bath was built over one part of the Roman baths, and enclosed the other part in its precincts. There is little evidence to show to what extent the Prior and monks and other religious used the Abbey baths, but their existence is a curious subterranean link between Roman and mediæval and modern times. John de Villula (Prior of Bath 1106-1123) probably made two baths—the Western for the public, the Eastern for himself and his Abbey ; but

for some forgotten reason the spring which had supplied the bath in Roman days was carefully blocked, perhaps in the fifteenth century, perhaps earlier. For generations the Abbey—or Eastern—Baths were fed by a conduit from the Western Baths, though there seems to have been a persistent tradition of a lost spring. When the Priory Estate was sold in 1614, it is stated in the particulars of sale as an attraction: “There is a bath in Hadnett’s tenement which was for the Prior’s private use, but it is now filled up with rubbish and covered with earth, and of no use; but there be many of the town that do remember when it was of great use, for there is as hot a spring in it as in any of the baths, and a little charge will repair it to its former virtue and fit for use.” Early in the eighteenth century an adventurous William Swallow tried to follow up this clue by excavation, but without any success. It was not till the middle of the nine-

teenth century that a workman in digging foundations found a flat stone carefully cemented down, and raising it with his pickaxe, let loose the old Roman spring, which welled up in a warm bubbling flood for the benefit of the owner and the healing of posterity. Undine and all the romance of wells and water crowd upon the imagination, but the Bath Corporation took a deplorably unromantic view of the circumstances, and, regarding the opening of the new spring as an attempt to evade their royalties, cut off the conduit which had hitherto been the only supply of the Abbey Baths. The Roman naiad found no difficulty in outwitting such a dog-in-the-manger policy ; the new source met all the demands made upon it. Bath was the richer for the discovery, and it was proved that there was no connection between the Corporation and the Abbey springs.

Some of the inconveniences which beset the public hot baths in the

eighteenth century made their appearance in the fifteenth. In 1450 Bishop Beckington of Bath and Wells puts under excommunication the practice of mixed naked bathing, and defines the costumes to be worn.

Before leaving mediæval Bath the Abbey Church requires a passing mention. It was the latest of the great English conventual churches, and became partially ruinous after the Dissolution. It is homogeneous and unaltered, the last word of Perpendicular on the grand scale. The decay of Gothic architecture has often been attributed to the change of religion, but a seductive decadence had already begun when Bath Abbey Church was built, and the church is not quite like anything else. The centre tower with its debased square-headed windows looks higher, lighter, and yet more stalwart than its dimensions would warrant. In the grouping of the city it is omnipre-



sent and strangely effective from every point of view. The west front with its Jacob's-ladders has taken hold of popular imagination, and the internal vista of the church is very striking, if a little too narrow for the height. The richness of the fan-vaulting, and the great and fantastic east window, give it a distinction which poor fittings and poor glass can scarcely affect. The munificence of a late rector (the Reverend Charles Kemble) must be had in grateful remembrance : he vaulted the nave, and built the flying buttresses to support it. From its series of great windows and its small extent of wall the church has been gracefully called the Lantern of England, as the neighbouring Church of St. John, Yeovil, said to be the last great parish church built before the change of religion, has been called the Lantern of the West. Let us now praise the famous men who built them both.

## II

TOWARDS the end of the seventeenth century Bath enjoyed a fitful repute for its cures. The excellence of the waters was vaguely talked of; but it had close competitors in Epsom and Tunbridge Wells. Scarborough also was noted for its spa, though not for amenities of the sea or sea-coast. In 1700 Abbé Prévost gives as the outstanding English watering-places Acton, Bath, Bristol, Epsom, Islington, Scarborough, and Tunbridge; but by 1745 Abbé Le Blanc found that Bath had swallowed up all its rivals. He did not even visit Epsom, Scarborough, or Tunbridge, “*parce qu’elles ne sont plus à-la-mode.*”

The visit of Charles II.’s Queen in 1663 was perhaps the first grand step

in Bath's development. Catherine had been attracted by the reputed efficacy of the waters in cases of sterility, but she did not derive the benefit which she sought, and her visit was made unhappy by the King appointing the ascendant beauty Miss Stewart to be one of her maids of honour. In 1687 Mary, James II.'s Queen, also came to Bath in quest of motherhood. Her official success was commemorated by the Earl of Melfort in a fulsome inscription which he set up in the Cross Bath. In 1702 and again in 1703 the visit of Queen Anne with the Prince Consort gave further *éclat*, and festivities of welcome were conducted on a scale hitherto unknown to the place. The Master of Ceremonies and official organizer was one Captain Webster. He was elected "King of Bath" by the burgesses in revival of an annual custom which was said to date from the time when Edgar was crowned King in the Abbey.

After 1703, however, Anne obstinately refused to come near the place again. It is said that Dr. John Radcliffe, the Royal Physician, advised her against Bath because he was financially interested in the success of Tunbridge. He wrote a tractate discrediting the efficacy of the Bath waters, and boasted that he "had put a toad in the spring."

But in the first half of the eighteenth century a transformation took place more wonderful than Cinderella. In 1700 Bath was a third-rate provincial town; in 1750 it was the Capital of Fashion, with a luxurious brilliance probably unequalled in Europe. The three consenting gods of this metamorphosis were Ralph Allen, who evolved the grand scheme and found the early money; John Wood, the architect, who, under Allen's inspiration, built a city of palaces to be the splendid background of the play of Bath; and Beau Nash, who drilled pleasure into a system and made

Bath the finest pleasure-town in all the world.

Of the three, Nash was probably the most important. It has become a fashion to look upon him as a pedantic fop with disreputable failings which poked their heads through the curtain. He was very much more than this, though we may not feel inclined to invest him with the halo of a saint, as some have been found to do.\* He was born in 1674, and came of a reputable Swansea family who derived some means from a partnership in glass-works. He sowed wild oats in many fields—at Oxford, in the Army, and in the Temple. He seemed, indeed, a most complete adventurer; he loved women and dice, and lived a life of expedients. He was an agreeable companion, of unexceptionable dress and manners; he spent more

\* He was fortunate (or unfortunate, for it is a dull piece of work) in having Goldsmith to write his life.

than his legitimate resources warranted and made a multitude of friends.

His first real chance came when the Inns of Court offered a pageant of congratulation to William of Orange. Nash was entrusted with its organization, and made such a success of the undertaking that the King offered him a knighthood, which he had the prudence to refuse. A year or two later the visit of Anne drew him to Bath. He thought, no doubt, that Opportunity would follow in the Queen's train, and especially the opportunity of gambling—for he was above all a gamester, though he had the reputation of a *joueur honnête*.

At Bath new doors were opened to him : Captain Webster, King of Bath, died, and Nash was chosen by the burgesses to succeed him. Then he made his great discovery : he invented the rigid organization and drill of pleasure. Instead of pleasure being an incident of medicine, medicine became a very

secondary incident of pleasure. Before long the new King of Bath was absolute ; no one ventured to dispute his commands, and the reins were not relaxed until old age relaxed the hands that held them.

Rule was badly wanted at Bath when Nash introduced it. The King's and the Queen's Baths, which were for more general use, were apt to become bear-gardens, and the Cross Bath, which the "gentry" tried to keep to themselves, was on occasion little better. There were constant complaints of coarse tobacco-smoking and horse-play. A band of five indifferent musicians performed aubades at the early bathing, but the melodies were drowned by the rowdy songs, shouts, and cat-calls of the company in the bath. Special guests were welcomed by special music, which had of course to be specially rewarded. The practice was revived in later years at Weymouth, where, when George III.

bathed, a band was towed out next to the royal machine to play "God Save the King" when his head reappeared after the first dip. The costume of the ladies was a "garment of yellow canvas which is stiff and made large, with great sleeves like a parson's gown. The water fills it up so that it's borne off that your shape is not seen. The gentlemen have drawers and waistcoats of the same canvas. This is the best linen, for the water will change any other yellow." In spite of all the yellow canvas, there were complaints of injudicious fair contriving to exhibit their charms too freely, and of a general laxity. It is uncertain how far there was real ground for such complaints, but in any case Nash soon insured that strict decorum should be, at least publicly, maintained. On one occasion a gentleman among the spectators in the promenade addressed too warm a compliment to a lady in the bath. The King of Bath, who was a strongly



built man, pushed him fully dressed into the water, and afterwards fought a duel of obligation.

Nash introduced good music, and insured proper attention being paid to it. "Has Dr. Radcliffe put a toad into the spring?" he laughed. "I will charm away its venom with music, as they charm back to life those whom the tarantula has bitten." For sixteen years Herschell conducted the Assembly Band, while later in the evenings he and his sister were discovering Uranus. Nash installed the Pump Room, procured the building of Theatre and Assembly Rooms, made public gardens and walks and drives, and on his footsteps followed John Wood, the architect magician who "staged those stately colonnaded terraces upon the hill which to-day delight all cultivated eyes."

Nash's rule was comical in its severity. If his "Laws of Bath" are humorously

(as the eighteenth century understood humour) couched, they were rigidly enforced. The splendid company submitted to being dragooned. Every hour of the day was strictly allotted, and the same high society met morning, noon, and night, in such a routine as the world had never seen. And so the wonder grew until a German wrote that the spectacle of a Bath'ball was unsurpassed in Europe. It was the frank confession of pleasure for pleasure's sake, and Nash's intuition that pleasure could be as rigidly controlled as toil, that did it all.

Let us leave the King of Bath for a moment and turn to another of the trinity, to Ralph Allen. In many ways he is greatly superior to Nash, in others he is not so interesting ; he is too good and too—rich. His life was as prosaic as a uniformly successful life is apt to be. He was the son of a Cornish innkeeper, and he helped his grandmother in her village post office at St. Columb. There

a post-office inspector noticed him and transferred him to the Bath Post Office. At Bath, it is said, he got possession (in 1715) of treasonable correspondence of some military importance. He gave the letters to General Wade, whose house still stands in Abbey Yard. He was rewarded by being made Postmaster of Bath and marrying General Wade's natural daughter.

Shortly afterwards he made the *grand coup* of his life in forming the cross-country posts of England. The only tolerable, or barely tolerable, posts in England were those to and from the Metropolis: if a letter was sent from Gloucester to Bath, it went by way of London. Allen conceived the idea of bettering the posts between the important towns of the provinces. The Post Office accepted the scheme, and Allen paid heavy royalties (running it is said to £20,000 a year) for the monopoly. At first he lost, afterwards he gained till

the revenues amounted to what at that time was a royal income.

To this source of riches he added another. He exploited the matchless stone quarries of Combe Down, just above Bath, and plumed himself upon an invention for bringing the blocks down the hill on tramways. He added wealth to wealth ; he built a town house in Bath, and a château looking over Bath, that famous Prior Park of which we shall speak later. He was modest, affable, simple in habits, unpretentious, munificent to public claims, generous to the poor, to prose-writers, to poets, to painters and actors ; he was the Squire Allworthy of Fielding ; he was a Mæcenas to literature ; he was, in fact, a paragon in every way ; and yet, he is uninteresting and leaves us cold.

Two things have conspired to keep his memory at least half alive—the salon of famous men that he gathered in his hotel-château of Prior Park, and the aid

that he gave to John Wood in the construction of the new Bath.

John Wood was the last of the trinity. He was the architect who staged the colonnaded terraces upon the hills. Practically nothing is known of his antecedents. He was possibly a Yorkshireman, was probably born about 1705, appears at Bath about 1724 and looms large till his death in 1754. In that period of amazing activity he designed and built an entirely new city,\* and whatever plans his early death left incomplete his son and other excellent continuators finished. In every *circumspice* of Bath is written the lasting memorial of the two Woods. It is a city entirely unlike any other city—homogeneous, contemporaneous, and undefiled. There was a reason for its growth in the great influx of visitors in the eighteenth century ;

\* He was at once architect, builder, and speculator, but never forgot that he was an artist.

there were a series of reasons for its growth being arrested at the close of that century ; and there is a reason for its not having been altered, because the spacious buildings erected in its apogee have more than sufficed for its decline.

In some ways Bath is a Pompeii without having been overwhelmed ; it is the earthly tabernacle which housed great persons of the past, the actual home in which they lived and loved, left intact as if they had only just gone out of the front-door. In the wide streets—classic, severe, yet never frigid—we feel ourselves to be part of a vast procession of shades :

“ All the air hath music for him who dreams  
and hears

Voices mixed of multitudes, feet of friends  
that pace.”

To each house is owed a tablet and a ghost. Detailed description is outside the scope of these notes, yet names spring up in memory : the Parades, the

Rooms, Gray Street, Milsom Street, Brock Street, Bath Street, Queen Square, the Circus, the Royal Crescent, the other crescents, and, a little later, the dignity of Great Pulteney Street, or Beaufort Buildings *riant* with broad terraced pavement and crimson cloak of creepers in the autumn of the year. To make room for all these the mediæval walls of Bath which had remained largely perfect fell flat as Jericho and disappeared.

In the north side of Queen Square, with its great pedimented centre, Wood's chaster style is perhaps seen at its best: his design for the rest of the square was hampered by difficulties of acquiring sites. On the south side, and preferably on an overcast day, the rich effect of Bath stone can be appreciated, with shades of brown and yellow darkening under the eaves into purple-black. The Circus, with its three (instead of the usual four) entries, is like nothing else-

where ; it is at once light and solid, elegant, ornamental, and restrained. Landon, the enthusiast, considers " nothing in Rome or in the world can equal it " ; to Mathew Bramble in Humphrey Clinker it " looks like Vespasian's amphitheatre turned outside in."

The Crescent is the *chef d'œuvre* of the younger Wood. Its uniformity, its majestic simplicity, the endless pairs of Ionic columns, the noble site, overwhelm the beholder. Yet afterwards perhaps he thinks it too gigantic, he feels the same sensation as a cathedral 2,000 feet long might produce.

The classic style was generally in the ascendant in those great building days of Bath, but it is difficult to believe that it was only this general atmosphere that inspired Wood. His classicism looks something more than skin-deep. Yet there is no evidence of any classic studies, nor of his having visited Italy or even France. In the early years of the



eighteenth century England stood insulated from the Continent ; there is no relation between English and French architecture. In England heavy Palladianism, or what passed for Palladianism, ruled supreme for all large buildings. Its oppressiveness is amply realized in piles like Blenheim, or the new front of Oriel at Oxford.

Wood's work in Bath may pass for unimpeachably classic, but his touch is light as well as sure. Very little of his draughtsmanship survives, and what does survive is bad ; in his " History of Bath " (a collection of absurdities) the architectural plates are entirely without value. The book is pervaded with a classic fervour, real or artificial, with dreams of an imperial city which were not to be realized. " I proposed to make a Grand Place of Assembly, to be called the Royal Forum ; another Place no less magnificent for the Exhibition of Sports, to be called the Grand Circus ;

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and a third Place, of equal State with either of the former, for the practice of medicinal exercises, to be called the Imperial Gymnasium of the City, taking its Rise," he adds with naïve credulity, "at first in Bath during the time of the Roman Emperors."

Wood was not always preserved from falling, but in Bath his work evinces in general a gracious sanity. He was never mastered by architecture as Piranesi was mastered, and, on the other hand, he avoided the tedious meticulousness of du Cerceau or Pugin. "If it is always tempting," says Reginald Blomfield,\* writing of Piranesi, "to think of the man of genius as arriving out of space as a new force of origin unknown"; it is especially tempting in Wood's case. It is impossible to say whence the great Bath architect came, but he trod, no doubt, a path of natural

\* In his admirable "Architectural Drawing and Draughtsmen."

development of which we can no longer trace the earlier steps. Yet his appearing is so sudden, and his work so extensive, so excellent, and so marvellously rapid, as to leave biography startled.

Prior Park is the great theme of Wood's panegyrists. It is natural that it should be so, for the situation is magnificent, the grounds are beautiful, the house is imposing, and has associations with historic names. A more considered judgment may find it pretentious, lacking in repose, a giant on tiptoe, grandiose rather than grand. If such criticism is possible it is difficult to say how far Wood is to be blamed. The shoemaker may indeed have gone beyond his last, Wood may have essayed something above his powers ; but, on the other hand, his plans were altered and much curtailed by Ralph Allen, and if the original design suffers by curtailment, it is not improved by additions after Wood's days.

It must also be remembered that Prior Park had a commercial origin. Allen wished it to be an advertisement of the excellent stone which was being dug in his quarries of Combe Down, just above the house. Wood carried out his instructions by making it as much a display house as possible, and if it is a little thin for its frontage, that is not, perhaps, Wood's fault. As he staged the colonnaded terraces upon the hills so he staged Prior Park across the head of the valley, 400 feet above the river. It forms an immense crescent, looking across the Avon to its fellow crescents on the other side ; but its near effect is now discounted by that chill which hangs about a derelict.

The place is an architectural embodiment of the eighteenth century. Classicism apparently still maintained its power, architecture still followed the older leaders, Palladio, Bramante, San Gallo, Crivelli, and the rest. A new

classical giant had been born in 1720—Piranesi, who was conquering Europe with his etchings of Roman remains, half real, half imaginary, half inspiration, half nightmare. “But, towards the middle of the eighteenth century, ruins and romantic landscapes were coming into favour, and mediæval architecture began to attract unenthusiastic if uncritical curiosity.”\*

‘It was an age of “vistas,” and a “vista” must terminate in a temple or a summer-house, a fountain or a bridge, a ruin, a column, an obelisk.† At Prior Park there is a great vista down the wooded combe closed very properly by “ornamental water” and a colonnaded and covered bridge. Prior Park itself is the shell of a palace, making a brave show outside, but inside gaunt and damaged by a great fire of eighty years

\* Blomfield, *ut supra*.

† In his “Description of Bath” Wood revels in obelisks.

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ago. It has been bandied from hand to hand with long breaks between the tenancies, and is in these latter days a military hospital. The wooded grounds that slope down below it are romantic with something of the unkempt romance which broods over those deserted villas in the Roman precincts, the Maclama, the d'Este, the Falconieri, and the rest. There must be shades that move through these groves by night, as at the Villa Hadriana itself where—

“ Men say that in these gardens of the night,  
     Down the long Cypress walks,  
 Are met such forms as shun the sweet day-  
 light,  
     That here the Fever stalks ;

“ That where the traveller comes by day and  
 sees  
     A heap of mouldering walls,  
 By night a thousand lamps hang from the  
 trees,  
     And in the haunted halls

“ Are heard the password and the bugle-blast,  
     The clank of greaves and spears,  
 Or wilder voices wailing for the past,  
     The irrevocable years.”

Two shades stand out among the others at Prior Park—Fielding and Pope. If later readers and other standards can no longer accept them at full face value, they were paramount in their day. Allen put them both under great obligations which Fielding acquitted royally and Pope scurvily enough.

Bath through the eighteenth century was an irresistible loadstone for men of letters. Great are the names which sweep across that stage: Rochester, Wycherley, Addison, Smollett, Walpole, and Sheridan and Steele. Many were visitors, and almost all the visitors were recurrent. Some were residents or quasi-residents, but of those that made Prior Park an hotel and ate of Allen's bounty, the greatest were Fielding and Pope. These for a foreground, and in the middle distance others like Anstey. In the presence of Anstey's "New Bath Guide" Walpole's tongue lost its bitterness. He falls into ecstasies

unusual to him. “There is a thing published that will make you drench your cheeks with laughing” (and we are tempted to envy the ease with which the eighteenth century was amused); “it is called ‘The New Bath Guide.’ It stole into the world, and for a fortnight no soul looked into it, concluding its name was its true name. It is a set of letters in verse, in all kinds of verses, describing the life of Bath and incidentally everything else; but so much humour, fun, and poetry, so much originality, never met together before. The man has a better ear than Dryden or Handel”; and more extravagant praise follows. Some of it is in truth dull enough, though it is better than much that passed for humour at the time, and the reader of to-day will find an interest in comparing it with Barham’s verse, and wondering whether Ingoldsby rhyming found its prototype in “The New Bath Guide.”



Walpole was fond of girding at Bath as a "mire-pit" or a "brimstone-pit." "Mountains are very good frames to a prospect, but here they run against one's nose, nor can one stir out of the town without clambering." "Their new buildings, that are so admired, look like a collection of little hospitals." *Où sont les neiges d'antan?* The little hospitals have outlasted Strawberry Hill.

Walpole was indeed an ill-natured and very bad critic of scenery, as scenery is judged to-day. Bath for him is "surrounded with perpendicular hills that have no beauty. Oh, how unlike my lovely Thames!" Nor is it only the landscape that fails. To him "the public rooms are insupportable"; in 1766 he says, as he leaves Bath: "To have lived three months in a fair, seems to me a century." He is in an ill-humour with the rooms, the balls, the clergy, the doctors, the waters, the tables, the ladies—with everything.

Women and dice had always been the great magnets of Bath, but the anecdotes relating to both are too many and too monotonous to recite. Thicknesse, in his "Prose Guide" (1780), has a caution for professional visitors: "Those who love play must understand it in a superlative degree if they expect to gain anything by it at Bath; . . . for however great an adept a man may think himself, he will always find here men—and women too—who are greater." It is difficult to say where the truth lies. Folly rather than vice is the predominant note of Anstey's Guide (and Anstey is not squeamish); there is plenty of folly but no hint of vice in Northanger Abbey and Persuasion, but, then, Jane Austen would not have touched vice even had she seen it; in *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal* it is folly that is shot in flying. Sheridan's labelled characters say and do exactly what everyone expects them

to say and do, but if they are not too natural they are clean.

In the true story of Elizabeth Linley and Sheridan himself, a professional libertine figures ; but in so wild a melodrama of *Flights to France*, *Affairs of Honour*, a *Covetous Father* and a *Thwarted Daughter*, even libertinism seems merely a creaking of stage machinery. It was a year's romance which closed in a most conventional marriage. " Sheridan, the bridegroom of two and twenty, had just declared that ' to hope for happiness from his attachment was and must be impossible ' ; Elizabeth, the bride of eighteen and a half, had but a few weeks earlier vowed ' in the most solemn manner ' that she would never with her own consent ' be his ' ;\* her covetous father had assured her that he would rather follow her to the grave than see her married to Sheri-

\* What a Lydia Languish expression " be his " !

dan'' ; and here they all were at Marylebone Church a great deal happier in the present and the future than any of them ever deserved. Were there no righteous left in the city, or were Sheridan and Elizabeth two of the "ten" ? Let us hope for the best and believe that if Bath was not better than other places of the same type, it was not much worse. Let us say with a "lady of fashion," as she turned her coach on Widcombe Down to take a last look at the White City lying below her : "Farewell, dear Bath ; nowhere so much scandal, nowhere so little sin."

The Bath doctors are often represented as charlatans and money-grabbers. One of the sprightliest of the Blunderhead letters (and Anstey is a sprightly man) makes merry at their expense, but as a class they were no doubt as honourable and kindly as their brothers of to-day. Their treatment corresponds so closely with modern

practice as to raise a doubt whether hydropathic knowledge is substantially increased ; and even if they were a little given to magnify their office they may still figure as legitimate progenitors of the specialists of Homburg, or Baden, or Nauheim.

In the great days of the eighteenth century watering-place very little is heard of the clergy ; they only become a factor of the situation at a considerably later date. But in 1739 a religious thunder-clap burst on the leisured, and luxurious crowd. An apostle appeared ; John Wesley and Nash crossed each other on the Parades, and " Satan took it ill to be attacked at his headquarters." At Wesley's first meeting there was an audience of four thousand, and if only one thousand were present at the second, the number was much larger at the third, for it was reported that the Master of the Ceremonies was going to stop the preaching.

Nash was no doubt "bored" by the whole proceedings. He was strictly orthodox, and considered such paroxysmal religion as subversive of the regularity and decorum which he had so painfully introduced. The story of the two men sparring is well known from Wesley's Journal :

" ' This is a conventicle, this is contrary to Act of Parliament ; and, besides, your preaching frightens people out of their wits. ' "

" ' Sir, did you ever hear me preach ? ' "

" ' No. ' "

" ' How then can you judge of what you never heard ? ' "

" ' Sir, by common report. ' "

" ' Common report is not enough. Give me leave, sir, to ask, is not your name Nash ? ' "

" ' My name is Nash. ' "

" ' Sir, I dare not judge of *you* by common report. ' "

The King of Bath is said to have

“replied not a word, but walked away.” Nash’s preoccupations were increased by seeing a real lady of title—Selina, Countess of Huntingdon—become a convert and very vigorous propagandist of Methodism. He embarked on religious discussion with her and even heard Whitfield preach at her house. The wits made merry over the matter. Caricatures of the Master of Ceremonies’ conversion passed from hand to hand, and broadsides were pinned up in the Pump Room announcing the date of his first sermon. Nash withdrew into his shell, and went no more to Lady Huntingdon’s. Meanwhile so many fashionable people swelled the preacher’s meetings that a list of them “reads like the peerage.” The nine days’ wonder ran its course, but religious ecstasies are seldom without inconvenience, as Anstey points out (and Anstey is not a prudish man). Yet, when the first effervescence had passed, some permanent effect of

the Wesleyan crusade no doubt remained. Its sobering influence may have frightened away some of the butterflies, and was perhaps one of the causes contributing to the decay of Bath.

In 1705 the first theatre, poor and inconvenient enough, was built in Bath. In 1750 it was supplanted by a second undertaken by John Palmer, "a brewer and candle-merchant," and father of another Bath Postmaster almost as famous as Ralph Allen himself. Palmer was a very remarkable man, his "school" became famous, and Bath was soon a *Scala* for London.

In 1775 Garrick sent Mrs. Siddons away from Drury Lane after some months of non-success. In 1776 Henderson saw her at Birmingham, was captivated, and wrote very warmly in her favour to Palmer. The greatest actress that England has ever known stepped on to the Bath stage on Octo-



ber 12th, 1778, and afterwards achieved there a renown that knew no limits. In 1782 she was recalled in triumph to Drury Lane, but she never forgot the scene of her first success, and on her tours revisited it many times. In making her adieux in 1782 she recited a pretty address of her own composition, and brought on to the stage the three reasons which alone could have induced her to return to London—her three little children.

The Bath audience was at once the most educated and the most decisive critic of the time. The verdict given by Bath was seldom reversed by London. If Bath sent actors to London, London lent them to Bath. All the great stage-names are found on Bath play-bills, and the tours at last become so frequent that the local company could not maintain its place. Before the end of the eighteenth century the decadence of the Bath theatre had begun, in the second de-

cade of the nineteenth century it was complete. The local focus was extinct.

While the theatre and the rooms, the gaming and the balls, the great company, the beauty and the splendid dresses, sparkled like fireworks in the "upper town," the life of the "lower town," of Horse Street or Stall Street, went on much as it does to-day with its humdrum business and comfortable religion. By degrees there grew up on the fringes of this quiet workaday life the equally quiet life of a somewhat superior residential class. They formed at first an intermediate stratum between the Quality at the top and the Trade at the bottom. The retired clergyman invaded Bath at the end of the eighteenth century, and the retired officer followed him in the earlier years of the nineteenth. As early as 1811 a French traveller could write : " Bath est une sorte de grand couvent peuplé de

## "DECLINE AND FALL OF BATH" 65

celibataires surannés des deux sexes et surtout de femmes '' ; and in 1841 *The decline and fall of Bath* is attributed by the author directly to the clergy : " Nothing thrives nowadays in Bath but preaching and praying."

Again, it is difficult to say how much truth there is in such statements. It is not impossible that Wesley's influence had left ripples behind, and that an influx of sedate residents had gradually a sobering effect on the place which made it less congenial to the pleasure-seekers. Perhaps it irked them to meet mentors of morality at every corner ; though the white-stocked Tilneys and Morlands of Miss Austen's Church assimilate themselves easily enough to the Bath ambient. Fancy pictures the retired clergymen who found houses in the Circus or Parades as men of education and refinement, evangelical, pink-faced, side-whiskered, ambrosial-locked, Lorenzo Bellamours who ate

calves'-foot jelly before preaching a charity sermon, and wore signet-rings. But they were censorious of other people's failings, and there was less moral surveillance on the Continent. Yet one is tempted to wonder whether some of these retired clergymen may not have felt an attraction subtle and unconfessed in the *vogue-la-galère* reputation that still hung about Bath. If they did, it may be that they themselves helped to kill the goose that laid the golden egg.

In any case, the coming of the clergy could only have been a small contribuent to the decline of Bath. Far more powerful causes were at work. The Continent had been a sealed book to more than a generation of English people ; but with peace the book was reopened. Facilities of travel increased, the romance of the Alps figured prominently in poetry and prose, Italy and the "grand tour" were voted an educa-

tional necessity. Byron and Shelley, Keats and Heine, were descanting on the Empyrean; an English watering-place was labelled "frowzy"; physicians repeated their parrot-cry of "change," but the change that they required was greater than Bath could offer.

There was a great growth of Continental spas, in each of which Bath found a competitor. Manners were easier over there and excuses could be found for leaving morals behind when the Channel was crossed. In the face of Piety or Pietism, the Goddess of Fortune moved her shrine; the tables were shut at Bath and opened at Baden, or Aix, or Homburg, and a dozen other foreign pleasure towns. For long years Baden—*le jardin de l'Europe*—held its great sway with casino, and baths, and matchless environment, and crowds of adoring French. In its gracious setting of stream, and hills, and woods, it

was a curious counterpart of Bath ; but if Bath lacks the Lichtenthaler Allée, Baden lacks the colonnaded terraces of the Avon slopes. In 1870 the French world left Baden for ever.

Side by side with the call to the Continent there was another curiously different call which drew English people to the less known parts of their own country. A real or affected "love of Nature" was cultivated. Johnson set out to lionize the Hebrides, Scott was making Scotland, Wordsworth was making the Lakes, and Mrs. Elton was fond of exploring with a barouche-landau.

The evolution of the seaside was also a factor of the situation. In the first half of the eighteenth century the sea was looked upon with aversion or dismay. It was a stage property of poets. For them the wild sea-mews shrieked, the waves were lashed to fury by the rocks or the rocks were lashed to fury

by the waves, there were "false-lights," and harrowing wrecks, and still more harrowing tales of helpless—if improvident—maidens "cut off" by the tide. The sea was haunted by buccaneers, smugglers, and wreckers. Yachting, boating, and bathing were unknown, but even from the land the sea inspired a dislike that is reflected in the total absence of any large houses on the coast before the days of George III.

Ralph Allen of Bath was the first apostle of the seaside. He went to Weymouth in 1763,\* built himself a house there, and praised the place so much that the Duke of Gloucester followed his example in 1780, and George III. in 1789. It was the constant summer resort of the Court until the graver failure of the King's health made that

\* Allen introduced the Bath Chair into Weymouth. It was invented by Heath of Bath about 1750, gradually made *le tour du monde* and superseded the Sedan.

no longer possible.\* The Regent set up a counterblast of his own in Brighton ; the seaside cult and fashion grew amazingly, and became the most potent of all the influences which were marshalled against the Queen of the West.

For a century the great comet Bath waxed brighter and brighter ; between 1700 and 1800 it had grown from a shy spa into a mondain capital. About 1800 it reached perihelion and after that began gradually, very gradually, to decline, with all the saddening dimness of a fading star. By degrees its life became that of an ordinary county town, except for a handful of faithful invalids drawn thither by the little understood and less exploited waters.† But the glorious heritage of its buildings re-

\* Towards the end of his life the physicians advised Bath for George III., and three houses in the Crescent were being prepared for him, when he died.

† Except perhaps by Brusa, the hot springs of Bath are unexcelled.



mains. Is it not another Uriconium, the whitest of white cities\* whose proud houses have so survived its fortune that the maker of books has come to rummage and label the place *évocateur*?

The passing of Bath was gradual, very gradual. Perhaps the place began to die when Nash died, or when Nash began to fail.† It outgrew the possi-

\* Fisher, writing to Constable, says, April 8th, 1825: "I rode yesterday out of the white atmosphere of Bath into the green village of Bath-Easton."

† He died February 12th, 1761, in his eighty-eighth year. He had outlived his fortune and reputation, and was in receipt of a dole (two guineas a week) from the Bath Corporation. He would never admit that he was old: though pleasure had long fled, he still pursued her in places where once he had been young. It was no doubt a sorry spectacle, yet when he died there was an outburst of popular regret which recalled the countless kindnesses of a long life. There was an immense public funeral, and the patients of his hospital, the poor, the lame, the emaciated, and the feeble, followed their old benefactor to his grave, shedding unfeigned tears.

bility of selectness. When Nash came, there was a population of 3,000, which had increased to 35,000 by 1800, and no Nash could have sifted such a crowd. Even in the palmy days, even among the quality, there are not wanting traces of a vulgar *sans-gêne* which recalls the “hydro” (odious word) or the seaside “pierrots” of to-day. The malady grew, and Bath lost tone. The best people stood aloof ; private parties began to supplant the public entertainments—a tendency which Nash had placed under his strictest interdict.

In 1825 a series of articles under the title of “The Bath Man” appeared in a London magazine. They pilloried the lack of breeding and vulgarity of the place. “What a world of contempt is conveyed in that little word Bath when applied to some unfortunate by one who claims any kindred or connexion with London !” “The holy horror with which every man and woman of fashion

in Town regards a Bath man," and so on.

In Bath the articles caused a natural commotion, for in those days the Press devoted more attention to Society's failings, and Society itself was more thin-skinned than is now the case. The terms were no doubt exaggerated; apologists and serious champions were not wanting, but by 1830 the fact stood confessed. The glory of the place was departed. Fashion gathered her skirts about her, and walked out of the temple, out of the White City, which had so long enshrined her.

The Lower Rooms had been closed in 1807 when the Upper Rooms were built, and by 1840 the Upper Rooms were little more than a shadow of former splendour. There were efforts at revival, but they were very like the despairing efforts which the coach-roads made when the railways were at their heels. There is a hopeless cry in those

great road embankments of Ferryhill, or Yellowham, or the deep cutting at Ridgeway, or the road tunnels at Charmouth and Beaminster, or in the pains with which the gradients were being eased on Widcombe Down, while all the while the railway was boring through Boxhill. There was to be no revival of fashion in Bath. Whatever else remained (and much remained) fashion had fled; the days were gone when a "Bath ball was possibly the most splendid spectacle in Europe."

If much was taken, much remained. Madame d'Arblay, who lived in Bath for many years and died there in 1840, sums up: "Bath is in England the only place for us, since here, all the year round, there is always the town at command and always the country for prospect, exercise and delight." After all, it was only a little thing that went out when Fashion fled; there were still left the valley and the hills, the trees, and gar-

dens, and the river ; there were the Abbey and the squares, the crescents, and the Circus, and the streets.

Of the streets, many are of architectural dignity and beauty, and one, Milsom Street, has a shopping cachet unequalled in any other provincial town, whether it is called, as once, the Regent Street, or, as now, the Bond Street, of the West. Those spacious streets, bathed in warmth and sunlight, dream of the glories passed away. In them we hear "voices mixed of multitudes, feet of friends that pace" ; and if the chill of winter falls sometimes even on the Avon slopes, Roman Bath wraps the purple laticlave about her and "never forgets the Palace whence she came."

As Prior Park was a material expression of the middle of the eighteenth century, so William Beckford was a metaphysical expression of its close. His family had shaken the Pagoda Tree in Jamaica ; his father lived in England,

bought a Wiltshire estate at Fonthill, and was twice Lord Mayor of London. William Beckford succeeded to an immense fortune. He was ten years old when his father died, and Lord Chat-ham, his godfather, took a close interest in his education. He was handsome, literary, and brilliant, and thought himself more brilliant than he really was. He travelled much on the Continent and was a sufficiently omnivorous amateur to make a vast collection of many first-rate and some indifferent articles. At Lausanne he bought Edward Gibbon's library,\* and it was at Lausanne that he printed "Vathek." There is no foundation for the statement (attributed to Beckford) that it was written in a single sitting of three and a half days. On the contrary, it is certain that it was carefully elaborated over a long period with

\* Six thousand volumes for £964. A year or two later he gave it away to a local Dr. Scholl.

Chavanne's help for the French and Henley's for the English.\*

“Vathek” (published in 1787 in French, and in 1786 in English) was considered a daring and interesting work by its contemporaries. There have been many editions printed, but it is doubtful whether in these days it would at first hand find either publisher or public.

The scene is laid in the Near East, and the story reads like an overlong and morbid Arabian Night. It is easily divisible into three portions—a relation of the unintelligible and unconvincing butcheries of a Caliph Vathek, an intermezzo of a love-idyll *à la* Longus, and a not wholly ineffective vision of hell.

Perhaps the most interesting thing in it is the construction of a vast tower ascended by 11,000 steps. This tower is the central feature, if not the central

\* Henley translated “Vathek” from French into English, and, without authority, published his version in 1786.

character, of the story, and was the first appearance of the tower in Beckford's life. The imaginary Tower of the Pied Horses was followed by the first and second towers of Fonthill, till the tower at Lansdown closed the chapter.

It was an age of posing. Beckford was a poseur, as Byron and Shelley were poseurs. Fonthill was a part of the pose ; he gave Wyatt *carte blanche*, and in an incredibly short time the "Abbey" was "run up" by great gangs of men working day and night. It was an immense and wildly fantastic place, built in Wyatt's vapid wedding-cake Gothic : it was a symbol of the supersession of Palladianism by "Gothic." There were galleries 330 feet long in which lamps burned all night ; there was a dining-room that could seat 300 people ; there were halls\* over 100 feet

\* There were many coats of arms in the hall and everywhere else in the Abbey, for "heraldry" was a weakness of Beckford, and



high, where artificial effects of light and shade were produced ; there were double doors 35 feet high whose bronze hinges “ weighed tons.” There was an “ oratory ” with an altar and ever-lighted candles which were seen at the end of vaulted galleries, and there was a picture of St. Anthony before which Beckford was supposed to pay midnight orisons. Storer ends his “ Description of Fonthill ” with an account of the Oratory : “ The effect of this solemn recess must be seen to be conceived, nor can any description convey an idea of the awful sensations it inspires.”\*

To a chosen few Beckford would improvise on piano or organ in the even-

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he liked to trace his family to all the early Kings and Queens of England.

\* Even Constable (August 29, 1823) was immensely impressed by Fonthill. He compares it to Salisbury Cathedral, and descants on the red velvet and general splendour of its fittings.

ings, or recite his own literary compositions ; but by nature or affectation he was a recluse, and even built a wall round his estate 12 feet high and nine miles long to keep out the curious and fox-hunters. As the Tower of the Pied Horses is the central figure in "Vathek," so a great tower was the predominating feature of Fonthill. It stood in the middle of the house and was over 300 feet high, but five years after it was built it totally collapsed. Beckford at once rebuilt it, and some twenty years later this second tower fell and ruined half the house. But by that time Fonthill had changed hands, and Beckford had moved down to Bath.

The depreciation of his Jamaica property is said to have forced even upon Beckford the need of retrenchment, but it is at least possible that he was simply tired of the Abbey. In 1822 England was "shaken by the news" that Font-

hill was to go to the hammer,\* and details of the sale, first of the house, and afterwards of the equipment, are astonishing. Seventy-two thousand copies of the auctioneer's catalogue were sold at a guinea a piece, though Beckford had already removed what he considered the gems of his collection.

At Bath he tried at first to purchase Prior Park, but refusing absolutely to pay a fantastic price for it, bought, and made into one, two houses in Lansdown Crescent. Above them on the down he acquired an estate and there he built his last tower. Like the others, it was a living place, but unlike them it stands to-day. Thither he took his patron St. Anthony, and there he made another oratory, dining-room, Etruscan library, and what not, all furnished *ad*

\* John Farquhar, nearly as eccentric if not as rich as Beckford, bought it privately for £330,000. He, too, had shaken the Pagoda Tree.

*unquem.* If failing fortune was indeed the cause of his leaving Fonthill, there was little evidence of it at Bath. His easy life pursued its even way. He built his tower, he attended to the furnishing of it and his Lansdown houses even to the smallest detail. He read, he wrote, he studied sale catalogues, he bought books on the grand scale, he formed great gardens and planted countless trees. It was only a change from "Abbot of Fonthill" to "Sultan of Lansdown." He was as handsome in his old age as he had been in his youth, and made a striking figure when he rode upon the down with one groom in front of him and two behind. His energy, whether in walking or riding, showed no abatement, and one of the many wild legends which Bath circulated about him was that he had found the secret of perpetual youth. Then there was a sharp seizure of bronchitis ; he scribbled to his only surviving daughter, the

Duchess of Hamilton : " Come quick, quick " ; and died shortly after her arrival on May 2nd, 1844.

At the foot of the tower he had made for himself a circular burial plot surrounded by a trench. There a cenotaph of polished pink granite was waiting for him, and by the side of it he had buried a favourite dog. The dog scandalized the clergy, and Beckford was buried at Bath Abbey.

Through the interest of the Duchess of Hamilton this decision was afterwards reversed ; the dog was dug up, Beckford was brought up the hill, and now rests at the foot of his fourth tower. The burial ground, as a condition of consecration, was made over to Walcot for a parish cemetery.

In it there are now plenty of monuments of suburban *luxe*, but the last tower of Beckford, in whose memory the place was given, is left in a deplorably neglected condition by

authorities as void of gratitude as of appreciation.\*

Bath, like Rome or Oxford, was ever a place of bells : " City lulled asleep by the chime of passing years." In the great days they rang venally for every distinguished and undistinguished arrival :

" I thought like a fool that they only would  
ring  
For a wedding, or judge, or the birth of a  
king ;  
But I found 'twas for me that the good-  
natured people  
Rang so hard that I thought they would  
pull down the steeple.  
So I took out my purse, as I hate to be  
shabby,  
And paid all the men when they came from  
the abbey."

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\* The tower is piteous in its abandonment : here a heavy open-work shutter in gilt-bronze wrenched off its hinges, there a gilt-bronze medallion fallen to the ground ; the stripped walls scrawled with *graffiti*, the ceilings dilapidated and the rain beating in.

The Abbey bells rang, too, for funerals. They rang a "muffled peal of Bob major" for Nash, and when they tolled for Beckford they rang the curtain down upon the last romance of the eighteenth century. He had lived nearly half way through the nineteenth, but to the last he took himself with all the seriousness of the eighteenth. He wrapped himself in Otranto mystery ; he moved in a world of his own where caliphs and houris jostled monks and troubadours, where poets and painters posed in abbeys and castles, surrounded by priceless treasures of the East and West.

Hannah More writes in 1792, not 1917 : " Bath, happy Bath, is as gay as if there were no war nor sin nor misery in the world. We roundabout all the morning lamenting the calamities of the times, anticipating our ruin, reprobating the taxation and regretting the general dissipation, and every night we are run-

ning into every excess to a degree unknown in calmer times."

If even in Bath faint ripples of a far-off war are felt to-day, the City still preserves its dignity sober and serene, still offers a warm cradle for old age and infirmity to rock themselves to sleep.

So let us again praise God for good hot water and for all good things, and for those famous men—Nash, who brought the company; Allen, who brought Wood; Wood, who staged the colonnaded terraces upon the sunny slopes.

















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